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AUTHOR Rudolph, Evan E.
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ABSTRACT

A total of 26 organizations and 33 departments of speech communication responded to questionnaires in a pilot study conducted to discern what large organizations expected from speech majors and from communications majors and to determine whether speech communication departments were meeting those expectations with their course offerings. The responses provided specific organizational expectations and raised questions concerning the offerings of speech departments and the degree of knowledge organizations have about speech majors. (Author/FL)

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A COMPARISON OF

ORGANIZATIONAL EXPECTATIONS

AND

SPEECH DEPARTMENT OFFERINGS

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Evan E. Rudolph
Associate Professor
Western Kentucky University

Abstract

This is a pilot survey aimed at answering three specific questions -

1. What do large organizations expect in the way of useable communications skills from Speech majors;
2. What do large organizations expect in the way of useable communications skills from Communications people; and,
3. Are Speech Communication Departments meeting organizational expectations with courses offered

The answers to these questions provide specific organizational expectations. The answers also raise questions concerning the offerings of Speech Departments and the degree of knowledge Personnel people have relative to what a speech major is.

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A Comparison of Organizational Expectations and Speech Department Offerings

Questions

What useable "skills" does a speech major offer you as a prospective employer?

As an employer, when you look for "communications people" what specific communications skills must they possess?

These are questions I asked recently of the Personnel or Recruiting Directors of 56 of the largest publicly held corporations in America.

I also requested recently a list of courses offered from 43 Speech-Communications departments in American colleges and universities.

Why? I wanted to find out three things:

1. What large organizations expect in the way of useable skills from Speech majors;
2. What large organizations expect in the way of useable skills from Communications people; and
3. Whether Speech-Communication departments meet organizational expectations with courses offered.

Answers

The answers to these questions offer specific organizational expectations. The answers also raise a question concerning the offerings of speech departments.

HANDS-ON VS TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

The controversy over the legitimacy of "use oriented" course offerings as opposed to "theoretical", "classical" or "traditional" course offerings is not new to the attendees of the 1979 SCA Convention. Many of you have been asked some variation of "Classical rhetoric is an interesting area of study, but how will it help me get a job and how can I use it when I get a job?"

Sixty years ago, that question might have been raised, but it's doubtful. In the early 1900's an education was primarily for the purpose of expanding the mind. The development of an analytical approach to problem solving was paramount. Today, that reasoning is being questioned.

Today, colleges are being called upon to prepare students for entry into the workforce. Colleges are expected to offer students "tools" that they can use in a work situation. One result in the ever increasing emphasis on the "practical" as opposed to the "classical" approach to education has been declining enrollment in several academic areas. Classical speech is one of those areas, and, with declining enrollment comes decreased course offerings and ultimately a cut in faculty positions. Thus, some departments of Speech find themselves facing a decision -- Should the department hold to its classical/traditional approach which emphasizes such areas as Rhetoric, Public Address, Communication Theory, Experimental Research Methods and Forensics or should it deemphasize tradition and embrace more fully such "new" courses as Conference

Leadership, Organizational Communication, Business and Professional Speaking and Interviewing.

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

The purpose of this paper is:

1. To report the answers to the survey questions
2. To clarify the implications inherent in the survey results.

NEED FOR THE SURVEY

There appears to be a good deal of interest among speech people in determining just which speech courses industry finds most useful. There is also some discussion of the intent of Speech-Communication curricula. To the best of my knowledge, however, there has been no published report of a comparison of the expectations of the organizational world with the communications proficiencies made available to Speech Communication graduates by departments of Speech.

The need for at least a pilot survey comparing organizational expectations with academic offerings was made clear to me in a meeting of the Applied Communications Interest Group at the 1978 SCA meeting in Minneapolis. At that session a rather spirited discussion ensued which focused in part on those of us from the industrial community asking just what a Speech graduate brought to the job market in terms of saleable skills. As I recall, the response centered on two areas:

1. A request for a specific "list" of skills industry expects Speech graduates to have; and,
2. The offering of "skills" such as listening, small group theory, giving speeches, and the ability to serve as a "communications consultant."

There was no real understanding on the part of the academic community as to what the industrial world expected. There was an equal lack of understanding on the part of most of us representing industry as to how a speech graduate possessing the skills mentioned above would prove to be any more valuable in an entry level position than someone with a business degree and a course in public speaking and one in group discussion.

It was anticipated then that the results of a comparative survey could clarify organizational expectations. It would also serve as an indication of whether the Speech discipline as a whole has oriented its course offerings toward the satisfaction of organizational expectations.

MORE QUESTIONS

The questionnaire sent to 56 organizations consisted of a brief statement of introduction and the two brief questions noted on page one. The questions were so few in number, so brief in content and were included in a letter for two specific reasons--

1. There is a relationship between the number of pages included in a questionnaire sent to Personnel people and the rate of return. The more pages the fewer returns.

2. The same relationship exists with the number of questions and the perceived amount of time necessary to complete the questions.

As I sent 56 questionnaires and received an initial return of 26 or 46%, there is some substantiation for the quick and short approach. A sample of the questionnaire is presented in Appendix 1, and Appendix 2 presents the names of the 26 companies responding. The companies selected represented a sample of large companies in 14 consumer areas.

The request for information from the Speech departments took the form of a brief letter explaining the project and asking for a listing of the Speech Communication courses offered. The format in which the course listings were returned was left to the discretion of the respondent. Again, brevity on my part and a minimum of work and time for the respondent apparently had a positive effect on the number of questionnaires returned.

Of 43 requests for course listings made, I received information from 33 departments for a 77% return. Appendix 3 presents the list of Speech departments responding to survey. Of the 43 departments included, 24 were selected as being representative of departments with a variety fo specialty areas in Speech Communication. The remaining 21 were selected at random from the 1979 Speech Communication Directory.

SURVEY RESULTS -- ORGANIZATIONAL

The results of the Business expectations survey, which are presented by Appendicies 4 and 5, indicate several things which should be of interest to the Speech-Communication area. The

results should be of particular note to those interested in placing Speech-Communications Majors in non-teaching jobs.

The response to the first question (useable skills offered by Speech Majors) can be grouped into 5 categories:

(1) Those respondents who felt that Speech Majors offered no special skills or just weren't interested in them;

(2) Those respondents who felt that Speech Majors offered "journalistic" skills;

(3) Those respondents who felt that Speech Majors offered "communications" skills;

(4) Those respondents whose comments indicate that they didn't really know what a "Speech Major" was; and,

(5) Those respondents who felt that Speech majors offered oral/or verbal skills

We can conclude from the first question that 29% (16) of the companies responding didn't think Speech Majors offered any special skill as prospective entrants into the job market. There's really nothing wrong with this if we are willing to accept the premise that Speech Majors have no more chance in the job market than college graduates who majored in English, History, Agriculture, Geography, Music or General Studies. Unfortunately, it doesn't say much for the growing assumption (among some Speech people) that a Speech major is a magic ticket to a job as a "Communicator", and if that doesn't work you can always get a job in Personnel.

The fact that 11% (6) of the respondents felt that Speech Majors offered journalistic or writing skills is an indication that the very people in industry who should know the most about

what a Speech Major brings to the job market may not know what Speech majors have to offer. Are they suggesting that writing skills would enhance the career chances of Speech Majors?

With 14% (8) of the respondents indicating that they thought that Speech majors offered "Communications" skills, it is left to the reader to determine just what that means.

When the responses of 27% (15) of the sample indicate that the respondent didn't really understand what a Speech major was, it's only a short jump to the conclusion that we evidently haven't been successful in advertising who we are and what our graduates do.

The assumption could be made that most of the respondents would have expected a Speech major to have verbal presentation skills. Surprisingly, only 9% (5) of the returns mentioned oral or verbal skills. Here again, is the conclusion that the respondents simply didn't know what a speech major was.

The responses to the second question (skills expected of communications people) can be grouped into 3 categories:

1. Those respondents who felt that communications people offered no particular skill or just weren't interested in them;
2. Those respondents who felt that communications people offered journalistic and/or media skills; and,
3. Those respondents who felt that communications people offered oral and/or verbal skills.

One can't help noticing the difference in the number of respondents who felt that Speech majors had no desirable skill and the number indicating that communications people had no de-

sirable skill. A total of 29% (16) respondents indicated lack of interest in Speech people while only 7% (4) were uninterested in communications people. Clearly - the business community perceives a difference in the usefulness of "Communications" people as compared to "Speech" people. The responses grouped in the second category provide some insight into the reason.

A substantial 36% (20) of the respondents indicated that they felt that communications people would offer journalistic and/or media skills. It is apparent that business has assumed that communication people are skilled in written communication. When this concept is carried to its extreme, it is notable that the majority of industry's formalized efforts to communicate are written or involve some form of media. Perhaps we in the Speech area should listen to that message.

Surprisingly, more of the respondents felt that Communications people would have oral and/or verbal skills than felt that Speech people would have oral and/or verbal skills. This makes very little sense but 14% (8) of the respondents felt that these skills would be possessed by Communications people and only 9% (5) felt that Speech people would have them. Could it be that Journalism and/or Public Relations graduates are considered to be more proficient in public speaking than Speech graduates?

SURVEY RESULTS - ACADEMIC

The second part of the survey concerned the courses offered by selected departments of Speech-Communication. The inclusion of an overview of the courses offered was thought to be beyond the scope of this paper. An expanded version of this survey should

include such an overview.

COMPARISON OF EXPECTATIONS AND OFFERINGS

In my estimation, the size of the samples was too small to allow any concrete conclusions to be drawn. The results do however, point to specific skills that organizations expect speech majors to have. The results also raise a question concerning the adequacy of speech department offerings.

The responding organizations indicated an expectation of at least two specific skills from Speech majors - oral/verbal and journalistic or written. In terms of placing our graduates in non-teaching positions then - it would make a good deal of sense to place departmental emphasis on these two areas.

At first glance we would seem to have no problem with the first skill - oral/verbal. Every deparment of speech-communication responding to the survey had at least one course in public speaking and most had a course in group discussion. On closer examination though we find that it is common practice in Speech Departments to assign the "Basic" courses to graduate students, part time faculty and/or junior members of the department. In this manner the more experienced members of the department are free to teach upper division courses and seminars in their particular area of interest. This area of interest in all likelihood is not public speaking or even applied small group work. It's generally an analysis of the theories behind the applied courses the business community expects from our students. The question -- are we giving our students what they need or what we enjoy researching and teaching -- should be asked.

Regardless, of whether the respondents understood what a speech major was or not, there is very little to be said about the second skill (journalism/writing) speech majors were thought to have. There are some exceptions, but in general -- Speech departments do not teach written communications. This is not an argument for a battle with English departments. It is a suggestion that if speech departments will not deal with such basics as speech writing, technical report writing, memo writing, and letter writing, they should encourage the Business, Journalism, English or Public Relations departments to do so and then require their majors and minors to take classes in these areas. Again the question -- are we giving our students what they need or what we enjoy researching and teaching -- should be asked.

SUMMARY

In summary then -- we are providing the opportunity for our majors to obtain one of the skills expected by the respondents to this survey - oral/verbal. We should ask though -- are the students getting the quality of instruction they need in the basic courses? The other expected skill -- writing -- is as a rule not provided by Speech - Communication Departments. Regardless of where they are offered though, Speech majors are in most instances, not required to take writing courses. Journalism/Public Relations students, on the other hand, often find that Group Discussion, Public Speaking, and Interviewing are required for a Journalism/Public Relations major.

Finally, the survey points out that industry prefers the more well-rounded "Communications" person over the "Speech Major" and, in fact, may not even know what a Speech Major is. Perhaps we would be well advised to increase our emphasis on the basic skills courses and broaden our perspective to include more "Communication" as industry views it.

An expanded version of this preliminary survey has been undertaken to determine just what skills industry expects from Speech Majors and whether Speech Majors are being offered those skills.

APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO 56 ORGANIZATIONS

APPENDIX 1

Dear

On behalf of the Speech Communication Association, I am surveying major U.S. organizations to determine their reactions to the "skills" college graduates with degrees in "Speech" have to offer when entering the job market. The results of the survey will have an impact on the future offerings of many academic Speech-Communication departments.

I suspect you are extremely busy. If you could spend three or so minutes responding to the following two questions, though, and return this sheet to me, you will help bridge the "gap" between business and the academic community.

1. From your point of view, what useable "skills" does a Speech major offer you as a prospective employer?

   _____

   _____

2. As an employer, when you look for "communications people", what specific communications skills must they possess?

   _____

   _____

Thank you very much for you help.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX 2

26 COMPANIES RESPONDING

Allis-Chalmers Corporation

Bethlehem Steel Corporation

Chase Manhattan Bank

Chrysler Corporation

Commonwealth Edison

Consolidated Edison Company

Deere & Company

Ford Motor Company

General Mills, Inc.

Gulf Oil Corporation

IBM Corporation

Indiana Bell Telephone

John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company

Kellogg Company

Kraft, Inc.

Kroger Company

Pacific Gas & Electric

Prudential Insurance Company of America

R. J. Reynolds Industries, Inc.

Safeway Stores, Inc.

Sears, Roebuck & Company

Standard Oil of California

Swift & Company

Union Oil of California

United Airlines

Winn-Dixie Stores, Inc.

APPENDIX 3

SPEECH DEPARTMENTS RESPONDING TO THE SURVEY

Berry College

Bowling Green State University

Eastern Illinois University

Florida State University

George Mason University

James Madison University

Lander College

Michigan State Univeristy

Murray State University

Northwestern University

Ohio State University

Ohio University

Ohio Wesleyan University

Pan American University

Pennsylvania State University

Purdue University

Rock Valley College

Southeastern Louisiana State University

University of Central Arkansas

University of Denver

University of Georgia

University of Houston

University of Illinois

University of Iowa

University of Minnesota

Univeristy of Missouri

University of Nevada

University of Southern California

University of Tennessee

University of Texas

University of Utah

University of Virginia

University of Wisconsin

APPENDIX 4

USEABLE SKILLS OFFERED BY SPEECH MAJORS AS PERCEIVED BY RESPONDING ORGANIZATIONS

Nothing directly relevant to entry-level assignments

Very few

Public relations writing experience

Minimal need for "speech" students

Broad liberal arts background

Liberal arts background

Speech majors are of no special interest

Look not for (speech) majors but other, e.g. business, finance, marketing, who have had speech courses

General educational background, ability to communicate

Broad education, written and verbal skills, and ability to organize

Other criteria carry a higher priority

None

Communications skills

No special skills

Should be useful in a marketing, public relations function

Oral communication

Self confidence

Oral and written communication

Speech writing

None

Written and oral presentations

None

Clear expression

None

Verbal/written and analytical

None that other college graduates don't have

APPENDIX 5

COMMUNICATION SKILLS EXPECTED OF "COMMUNICATION PEOPLE" BY RESPONDING ORGANIZATIONS

Creative writing

Translate economic/technical data to print, electronic media and/or face to face

Writing, business savy

Writing skills

Writing, editing, interviewing, reporting, media, technical production, present ideas, understanding of business system

Training and experience in public information media and public relations

Report writing, presentation of project assignments

Writing, platform, audio-visual

Writing and speaking

Writing ability

Talking, listening and understanding

Writing and verbal skills

Media experience

No effort made in the communications area

Advertising majors

Creative writing and oral skills

Oral/writing abilities

Don't hire "communications people" per se into entry level jobs

Do not recruit speech majors

Written presentations etc.

Oral skills

Writing

Written communication skills

Do not hire

Interpersonal, verbal and written

Journalistic - writing skills

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